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A CROSS-CULTURAL VIEW OF EGO DYNAMICS*

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INDIVIDUALITY

WHAT I suggested in my previous lecture is, of course, only a sketch of the viewpoint that emerges when one takes a cross-cultural stance and views experimental and clinical data in terms of the various types of cultural relativity that necessarily emerge. It is, to be sure, a very different matter to apply this way of thinking to fresh material and to see how far it proves valid. I should like to try my hand at this with the assistance of, as usual, those who have gone before me, with the primary aim of discovering whether right now, in our work with human beings, it makes a significant difference for our work whether we think cross-culturally or not.

I have recently discussed, with a number of friends including analysts, the question of whether the cross-cultural viewpoint really influences the assessment of human beings. People, they say, are pretty much the same everywhere, and the psychodynamics are pretty much the same. The friend you lunched with yesterday may remind you of that other friend in Rio de Janeiro, or Singapore, whose basic

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human quality is much the same. Analysts at work in India and in Japan tell us that the problems encountered in therapy, in the observation of parapraxies, and in psychosomatics are everywhere the same.

Insofar as I am concerned, these generalizations, though hard to pin down within a uniform frame of reference, may very well be true. They are simply immaterial to the issue I am trying to define. It is comments such as this that make me realize how far those of us in the social sciences have failed to communicate to analysts the real implications of a cross-cultural point of view. Of course the dynamics, being human dynamics, would be the same everywhere. Indeed, if they spring from the nature of human conflicts both between the individual and the cultural norm, and also between various aspects of the cultural norm, they will necessarily produce psychophysiological stress and symptomatology wherever they are. The real issue, however, is what *kinds* of stress they produce, what kinds of conflicting goals are set up, what kinds of obligations and duties nullify the impulses of the hour. As soon as one begins to speak of a "shame culture" versus a "guilt culture," recognizing that, in the former, social shame pressures may be more prominent than a private sense of guilt, one admits essentially that the dynamics, universal for humankind, are themselves molded into different propositional forms. When we undertake to say what is clashing with what, even at the raw observational level, the structural problems of a heterogeneous cultural matrix, parts of which pull and tear in contact with other parts, and the even more stressful problems of the parts of the individual that are thrown by the culture into opposition to other parts, will cause different nosological pictures, and they will form, behind these, far more important, different basic character entities.

All this has been grasped here and there from time to time but has somehow failed to achieve that concreteness that would make it stick permanently. If we push the issue a little further, moreover, with emphasis upon that large development in modern experimental psychology known as the "new look" in perception, we begin to realize that these cultural phenomena do not belong to the outer husks of personality structure but are found right down through to the heart and core of the ego organization itself. Because of the considerations I have already urged on you, I have asked you to consider the possibility that there is really nothing in the perceptual, cognitive, or rational life of man that

is really a pure, pure reason, independent of the life struggle from which it all starts. There is really "no hiding place down there."

Education

Let us then try applying this way of thinking to a series of concrete contemporary problems. I shall begin with education, specifically with the revolution, or series of revolutions, now going on in our schools. The historical factors most evident, on first inspection, are first the increasing importance of technical competence in an industrial society, the shift of the population from agriculture to urban gainful activity, and the honeycombing of urban life into a multilayered system of operations in which raw materials are manipulated into evermore complex products. This means more and more emphasis everywhere upon the early acquisition of skills that bring competitive remuneration. This is going on in India exactly as it is going on in Nigeria, exactly as it is going on in Westport, Conn., or Topeka, Kan. The second obvious historical factor is the increasing understanding of the learning process, on the basis of which a successful use of conditioning techniques and of teaching machines—human or other—has now been asked to take over this rapid escalation into the world of higher skill. The third component, somewhat related to the other two but partly derived directly from the nature of science itself, is the concept that all knowledge can be broken down into a certain very large ultimate number of bits that can then be processed, fitted, arrayed or even, at times, actually organized into higher units that have an educational, technological value.

Now it follows from all three of these major principles that there will necessarily be, in our schools, a new rationalization in both senses of the term: that is, a rational analysis of the task of education, and a rationalization in the psychoanalytic sense, making this all appear an unquestionable good for the soul of man. If you look at Western culture and then ask which components of this Western culture are to be found also in India and Nigeria by virtue of importation and communication, you will note that a kind of disruption is caused in India and in Nigeria, a sort of havoc in terms of conflict with traditional values whereas, in our own society, there is almost no such conflict. There is a massive unity, a massive sense in the remaking of the educational process along the lines just described. If, now, you look at this new education, you will find that it consists largely of the study of the

child's mind in terms of its rate of growth, general and particular, the kinds of vocabulary, and the kinds of arithmetical operations that can be mastered at each level, the amount of information and the complexity of the skill that can be acquired in the ascending orders of school curricula. You will find that a rethinking of the nature of arithmetical operations has often delighted both the teacher and the child, and that the newer rationality has expedited not only day-by-day learning, but general enthusiasm for the things of the mind.

You will find, at the same time, that there are numerous values deeply ingrained in the United States that do not so easily array themselves in perfect alignment with the new concepts. There is a very great deal in our tradition about individualism, in all its various forms—competitive and creative—and a very great deal about sidestepping the universal norms and finding one's own private shortcut. There is a great deal also, and this is even more important, about the marriage of thought and love, as these ideas have been stressed in the tradition of Plato and revived in the evolutionary psychology of Darwin, in the light of which one discovers that loving to learn, and learning to love, precondition and set the eternal limit of what can be done by any assignment of sheer information processing. The natural limits that are set upon what can happen with the new movements in education are set not by human nature as such, but by the ego dynamics of people in the United States in this latter half of the 20th century, whose culture defines both the information-processing tasks, and some of the imaginative or even poetic tasks which, if one looks closely, are very deep in the heart of our individualistic tradition. Much that we say about education when we talk to British, German, or Japanese contemporaries becomes unintelligible to them unless they understand this. These points can be particularized much further. In the Westchester schools to which my own children went, there were many assumptions about spontaneity that are simply unknown to many of the parents of the children in the Topeka schools, as we observe them today. We should have to go into the economic structure of the two communities much more fully than I can do to explain all that one sees. But a very rich and complicated recipe of information about Kansas farming and its vicissitudes in recent years, with its consequent influences upon man in the humbler economic brackets, will begin to illuminate the question of why, most paradoxically, very able boys in a very pioneering culture can become

utterly bored with school and utterly self-defeating in their lives.

But let us look, for a moment, at youth of college age. Everywhere, of course, college students are subject to great family pressures. They must compete for good grades, scholarships; they must make a favorable impression upon the business representatives who interview them in their junior or senior year; they must get through the filter paper of admission committees to professional schools. If you think our family pressures are extreme, you should, however, look at those in many other parts of the world in which the family is far stronger, tighter, and more solid than it is with us, and against which there is far less recourse. In fact, after taking a look at European and Asian family systems and educational systems, you will probably come back to our own with quite a different conception of the ego dynamics involved. The young man who does not do what his parents expect or desire during or after the college years is neither starved nor humiliated; in fact, there are so many ways to shoot the rapids that he may very well take a different route and do much better than his father did. He may, moreover, get much more out of life on his own terms. Our pioneering, individualistic tradition which, for the 95 per cent nonintellectuals, never was conceived in academic terms anyway, can carve out a way of life, for better or for worse, in which there may frequently be very little conflict indeed.

In fact, if you look at the conflict of the intellectuals with this nonintellectual culture, you begin to get a new feeling about college athletics, fraternities and sororities, rah-rahism in general, and the supposed laziness and boondogglery of youth in the United States. It is not all due to the fact that, a few decades ago, we selected the academically bright and put them through the academic sieve. Now we take almost all except those from the economically and educationally least privileged strata. And if they do not like the mathematics, history, and literature that we offer them, we can shrug our shoulders, expatiate on our superiority to them, and weep about the future leadership of the United States as much as we like. It is only to a very small degree a matter of fitting the square nonintellectual heads into round intellectual holes. It is much more a reflection of the sturdy and persisting anachronisms of education in the United States: the assumption that what was appropriate education in the late 19th century is appropriate education today. The matter is, of course, greatly complicated by the pressures exerted

against liberal education in the traditional sense, as Jacques Barzun has been pointing out. No one familiar with modern students, however, would suggest that during these four years of early manhood, the majority of them can, within our cultural setting, be turned into thoughtful students of society. There is indeed a very intense, ambitious, preprofessional group. There is an earnest, soulful, dedicated group concerned with humanitarian issues: let us say the Congress of Racial Equality or the Peace Corps group. Basically, however, the trouble is not with the educational system as such, nor with the ego structure of modern youth as such. It is a cultural problem involving profound cultural dissonances within culture in the United States, and it must be understood by social scientists, psychologists, and psychiatrists if it is to be seen either educationally or therapeutically. There may be research studies pointing out, in highly individual biographical terms, the kinds of historical groups that I am describing and the types of contemporary conflict into which they move, but I am not familiar with such literature, and I suspect that it does not exist. At any rate, it will only be when it both exists and becomes pinpointed in such a way that the school administrators, the teachers, and the students can use the knowledge, that it will become useful.

If you feel that the dissonances that I have described in our education are uniquely pertinent to our own problem, you need only look at what still goes on with regard to students arriving from all over the world to receive an education in the United States, often conceived as a panacea for human difficulties everywhere, as a quick guarantee of economic success upon return to the homeland, and as a status badge with which few can compare. The trouble upon closer inspection is that students from the new, emerging preindustrial societies, realizing something about the power of science and technology, are being hurled into the maelstrom of life in the United States, confused and repelled by much of it, clinging doggedly to the kinds of knowledge and skill to which they are exposed, and often returning to their own countries with much uncertainty as to whether all this will be useful, and knowing from the fate of their predecessors and contemporaries that many will be unable to use what has been acquired.

Our own cultural response in such a situation is to try to place the blame: Whose fault is it? We begin with phrases such as "they ought," or "their governments ought," or "we ought." The moralistic approach

to imbalances and conflicts of this sort is another aspect of ego structure in the United States which, if I had the skill, I should pursue with you through all our remaining time. It is, in fact, the beclouding of all these difficult issues by the impulse to make quick and easy moralistic judgments that makes me feel that somehow, despite all difficulties, I should have got the term *superego structure* into this analysis, or at least have insisted that the world of values, "oughts," "musts," and categorical imperatives "must" be understood cross-culturally if we are to be reasonably sane and relaxed regarding our own approach to these difficulties. My impression, however superficial this may be, is that the attempted solution of these problems by recourse to superego dynamics, particularly by intensely emotional use of the terms *must*, *should*, and *ought*, is even more characteristic of the Asian group—Japanese and Indian—with whom I have had a little contact, than it is of ourselves. And I venture to say that in the cross-cultural studies that are to follow in the next few decades, more and more will deal with the loosening of superego structure as a result of industrialization. If I am right about this, our moralistic intensities, however much damage they achieve, will gradually decline; while among the Asian, and perhaps this is also true of European, African, and Latin American societies, an increasing conflict between traditional norms and industrial necessities will probably increase a proneness to this kind of moralistic shock. If the facts support such a viewpoint, life in the United States will come in for an increasing amount of superego criticism by the nations of most of the world, and for criticism that is, of course, "justified" if one insists on reacting moralistically to a moralistic challenge. The basic issue for thoughtful analysts is always, I believe, to be ready to reserve moralistic judgments while facts are being dug up, and to realize that the facts will themselves be viewed in a different relativistic light as they emerge.

National Character

Related to these concepts regarding ego dynamics, there is the psychology of nations and of international relations. It will be recalled that modern social psychology arose, in large part, from studies of crowd, or even mob, psychology; that Freud felt it necessary to begin with Gustave Le Bon's studies of the crowd; that he himself, shortly after World War I, found it necessary to emphasize the irrational bonds —if you like, the libidinal bonds—that hold groups together and anchor

them to their father-surrogate leader. Much water has gone under the bridge, as anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists have looked at the psychological structures of national groups. Nearly forty years ago, Harold Lasswell of the University of Chicago attempted psychoanalytic studies of political leaders, and A. Oeser suggested ways in which the psychology of individuality might relate to the study of political leaders. It then began to dawn on the investigators that if the anthropologists were right, there would necessarily be a different group psychology in each culture; there would necessarily be a different nationality psychology in each nation. With this higher level of sophistication, Otto Klineberg explored the concept of national character. No one, however, seemed to find a methodology adequate to the problem. Perhaps this is because the ego dynamics of the members of defined social groups are not understood well enough to permit the discussion of group interrelationships and belongingness—what the sociologists of today call the psychology-of-reference groups—and the relation of these to the peculiarly local and particularistic character of specific leaders. One thing that has been very evident is the study of these group principles as they developed, the recognition that leadership is largely a function of the kind of group—both the kind of people in the group and the kind of relationships which they obtain, one to another. The psychology of leadership is a weasel conception until it is particularized in the group structures. This means, then, that within each cultural or national context, particular kinds of groups such as Soviet pioneer groups or German Nazi groups or American radical or humanitarian groups can arise and that, cutting across these, there will be groups with tight and homogeneous value structures—all the members of which are ready to devote themselves to a common goal—and loosely organized centrifugal groups whose members fly off if any demand is made upon them. Different kinds of leaders emerge within the various kinds of groups.

Perhaps this is, in part, the solution of the huge and pressing problem of the charismatic leader who appears to owe so little to the background. Such a leader emerges, like Lincoln, from a log-cabin background, as did Mohandas Gandhi from the pettiness and dry rot of the study of law and, in spite of or because of supreme indifference to common desires, common sense, and common modes of reality testing, he makes the shapeless mass into a battering ram to destroy old institu-

tions and prepare for the new. Substitute, however, the cross-cultural way of thinking and one finds that the charisma in each case, the peculiar hardihood and inner certainty of ego structure, arose within its own soil of pioneer Midwestern United States, or of Indian merchant-caste mentality, and it was the resonance of the leader and the led that provided a mutually reinforcing intensity; the ego dynamics of the charistmatic leader are an expression of it and a reinforcing agent within the specific cultural potentialities. There is no psychology of the leader that is not cross-cultural.

Social Change

We come finally to the problem of social change. Thomas Carlyle, it will be recalled, described history in terms of the lives of great men. For him, turning points in the story of mankind are provided by individual force of character, rarely but transcendently redirecting the historical flow. For Leo Tolstoi, however, the man is but the agent of the historical processes: war and peace flow from inexorable cultural necessity. Karl Marx, Arnold J. Toynbee, and many others have wrestled with this problem. Our suggestion here is that concepts such as force of character, masterful imagination, and indomitable will need to be refined into the specific dynamics that we have been using together. From the present viewpoint, history is remade when the quality of reality testing permits perception of social realities never sharply and clearly glimpsed before. This is notable in the case of Thomas Hobbes, of Marx, or of other leaders having a rare quality of impulse control, under which mounting suspense was still kept in order until the thunderbolt was released, as in Adolf Hitler's attack on Poland in August 1939; or when a peculiar transformation of the self-image has suddenly remade the world outlook as when, for example, Gandhi, leader of a South African contingent of Indians, became, in the Ahmedabad strike, an Indian leader with a full conception of the sublimity and timelessness of such a self-transformation. My credit lines and my gratitude here are due to the imagination of Erik Erikson. It is the study of the psychoanalytic properties of the ego that is most urgently needed here to understand the nature of this type of leadership, its relation to the ego dynamics of the immediately surrounding group of followers, and the vast national group that lay beyond. I suggest, therefore, that instead of speaking of bland and formless generalities such as the per-

sonality of the leader, or the social quality of the public to which he responds, we try to apply the psychology of effective functions, reality testing, impulse control, and the rest.

Psychotherapy

Finally, I shall have the boldness—perhaps one might even say the effrontery—to make a few comments upon the relationship of these ideas to the process of psychotherapy considered in its social context as a form of interpersonal interaction and as an expression of basic values regarding health, the dignity of the individual, the nature of interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict, and of various goals of integrity and self-realization, which are precious to us. I offer these ideas for whatever they may be worth in a social science context, and if they have any application to your own lives as therapists, you will have to make such applications yourselves, for it is not my task to take this last step, so utterly beyond my competence or my present aim. I am looking at psychotherapy simply in terms of the frame of reference that I have tried to establish.

This frame of reference, you recall, involves certain notions about ego dynamics as related to the culture of which one is a part. The patient comes to you because of certain culturally ingrained ideas regarding the practice of medicine, regarding personal illness, regarding the benefits accruing to those who seek certain types of medical help, and within a rich context of knowledge, whatever it may be, regarding therapeutic processes. As seen from the psychoanalytic viewpoint, a great many actual or potential sufferers do not come to you. They are excluded for a variety of reasons—economic, psychosocial, and inwardly personal. Your experience, moreover, in your medical and specialized training has given you more and more context for certain kinds of people who make certain kinds of assumptions. Certain people are excluded, certain others are included, in the context that you have made. You have read certain books and papers, and have been subjected to various types of controls both in the broad and the more technical use of the term. What you see in the ego dynamics, as in the entire personal presentation of your patient, whether conscious, preconscious, or unconscious, is a function of your own context, your own place in your own reference group, your own self-image, your own reality-testing, impulse-control dynamics. The patient begins to work on you; he

begins to remake you. The older you are, and the more sturdy your professional experience and self-image, the less he probably achieves, but he gives you quite a going-over. When you write your professional papers, you do not describe this part of the transaction. At least, I have read very few papers on the theme—however you wish to phrase it—"what I learned from patient X about myself," or "the ego dynamics of the therapist as they became familiar in the therapist's dreams," or "why I resent the references to myself observed in certain classes of patients" or, notably, "why the difference between my patient's background and my own made it impossible for me to understand him." I think we should all benefit greatly from at least one paper under each of these four headings.

You will feel, probably rightly, that I have overfractionated the ego and its dynamics for the purposes of the present discussion. Is there no such thing as the ego as a whole, or the integrated, the indivisible ego, the ego in which all the components are so beautifully articulated with the whole that all further descriptive tasks must refer not to the parts, but to the integration? Yes, there is definitely a sense in which this kind of definition of the ego must be allowed. And, in closing, I shall try to show the nature of the situations in which it is allowable. I shall illustrate what I mean by citing the fact that in our Menninger Foundation study of psychotherapy, in which raters evaluated long lists of attributes shown by their patients and applied the method of factor analysis, the factor known as ego strength emerged as by far the most important single factor related to the mental health of the patient. I mean quite literally that it is possible to get experienced therapists to rate their patients on such attributes; that they agree when they know the patients well enough to apply the terminology; and that they do show the requisite changes over time as the patient changes in response to therapy or other factors in his life. We have then the clearly emerging fact that there is, at least in human observation and parlance, such a thing as ego strength, which can be identified in its varying degrees in particular observed persons.

Now, what is ego strength? My hypothesis is that it is a willingness to perceive both the adequate and the inadequate aspects in one's self in each situation and that, therefore, it is closely related to reality testing; that in view of this adequacy or inadequacy, as judged by the individual, there will be a greater or lesser need for secondary narcissistic

reactions or a building-up of the self to meet the demand; that there will be mechanisms of delay, or of impulse control, proportional to the total sense of adequacy of the self as realistically judged; and that willingness to incur narcissistic wounds will depend largely upon the ruggedness and firmness of the self image. Genetically, I am inclined to view this adequacy of self-image in terms of the specific affections and approvals given by the parents, the siblings, the other members of the primary social group, eked out and abetted by later emotional reinforcement and elaboration. I therefore tend to regard ego strength as dependent partly upon the actual adequacy of the organism as an organism which, if it has any reality testing, it can observe and bank upon in meeting life's needs and, secondarily, upon the sociocultural tenor of appraisal regarding the young individual with reference to the demands made upon him. I am inclined to say, then, that ego strength is very largely dependent upon the particular types of affections and approvals that are directed by the family and others to the growing individual, and that race, sex, economic class, and other variables, being affectively overloaded in our society and in most societies, will very largely color the sense of adequacy upon which so much depends. While still agreeing that the original strength, alertness, special skills, and so on of the growing individual play a very considerable part in how good he seems to himself relative to the demands made upon him, I still believe that the quality of the demands in a particular sociocultural setting is of very profound importance for the sense of adequacy that he develops. I do not say that ego strength is solely a matter of this inner self-regard, but I do say that statistically, clinically, and rationally, it should be very closely related to it; and that, insofar as I know, this is a good hypothesis for further work. I am saying, therefore, that while Bela Mittelmann won the debate to which I referred earlier in showing that the term *ego* has many different meanings in psychoanalysis, there is a sense in which David Rapaport also won the debate in showing that there are central and fundamental psychological realities in the growing individual which, as in the refraction of light, varied expressions emerge at different periods.

I am inclined to say, then, that although there is such a thing as the cultural feeding or warping of each of the modes of ego expression that I have considered, there is also a certain feeding or warping of a central ego dynamic. Culture operates then both upon the parts and upon the whole, both upon the separate atoms and upon the constellated structure of the ego.